

Message Text

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ACTION SP-02

INFO OCT-01 AF-04 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 PA-01

AID-05 L-01 ABF-01 CIAE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00 RSC-01 PC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5862

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 1355

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, GB, US

SUBJ: FY 76 PEACE CORPS PROGRAM

FROM AMBASSADOR

REF: STATE 236947

1. SUMMARY: ACTION PROPOSAL WOULD HAVE NEGATIVE IMPACT
IN GABON.

2. WHILE FULLY UNDERSTANDING NEED TO LIMIT GOVERNMENT
SPENDING AND LOGIC OF REQUIRING GREATER
HOST CONTRIBUTIONS FROM COUNTRIES WITH RELATIVELY HIGH
PER CAPITA GNP, FEEL COMPELLED TO POINT OUT TWO FACTORS
WHICH ARE PARTICULARLY PERTINENT TO PC PROGRAM IN GABON.

3. GNP ARGUMENT: WHILE GABON GNP PER CAPITA IS RELATIVELY
HIGH, FIGURE CAN BE MISLEADING. IN GABONESE EYES GABON IS ONE
OF MOST UNDEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN AFRICA. IT IS ALMOST BEREFT OF
TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE (ROAD, RAIL, BRIDGES) HAS ONLY
EMBRYONIC INDUSTRY AND ONLY BEGINNING TO HARNESS ITS HYDROELECTRIC
POTENTIAL. POPULATION ALMOST TOTALLY UNTRAINED, 85 PERCENT IL-
LITERATE AND LIVING MOSTLY AT SUBSISTENCE LEVEL OUTSIDE MODERN
ECONOMY SECTOR. MOST INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE LIBREVILLE WHO
BENEFIT FROM PEACE CORPS ASSISTANCE ENJOY VERY LOW PER CAPITA
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INCOME (PEACE CORPS IN ITS ESSENCE IS HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

DESIGNED TO HELP MOST NEEDY WHICH IT CERTAINLY DOES IN GABON). LARGE PORTION OF GNP (DESPITE BEST GOG EFFORTS) GOES ABROAD IN FORM OF PROFITS OF FOREIGN COMPANIES EXPLOITING OIL, MINERAL AND TIMBER RESOURCES WHICH GABONESE NOT YET SUFFICIENTLY SKILLED TO EXPLOIT THEMSELVES. REMAINING (RELATIVELY LARGE) GOG REVENUES BEING SPENT MOSTLY FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (ROADS, RAIL, DAMS, ETC.) AND EDUCATION OF PEOPLE, IN ORDER TO LIFT COUNTRY OUT OF ITS EXTREMELY LOW LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT. GOG THEREFORE WISHES TO MAXIMIZE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE UNTIL SUCH FIGURES AS GNP PER CAPITA BECOME MEANINGFUL IN TERMS OF ACTUAL LIVES OF GABONESE.

4. HISTORY OF PC IN GABON: WILL BE RECALLED THAT FIVE YEARS AFTER PC ASKED TO LEAVE GABON, PRESIDENT BONGO ASKED FOR RETURN OF PC IN DECEMBER OF 1972. RECORD WILL CLEARLY SHOW THAT BONGO CATEGORICAL THAT GOG FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS WAS TO BE MINIMAL. PC COULD VERY WELL AT THAT TIME HAVE SAID THAT BECAUSE OF BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS, PC VERY SORRY IT COULD NOT UNDERTAKE ANY NEW PROGRAMS. QUITE TO THE CONTRARY, PC WAS MOST ENTHUSIASTIC AT TIME AND IN TOP LEVEL MEETINGS I ATTENDED IN WASHINGTON ASSURED ME THAT GABON WOULD BE GIVEN SPECIAL CONSIDERATION. IN LAST TWO YEARS THIS ATTITUDE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN CONSIDERABLY ALTERED. MEANWHILE, PC DIRECTOR AND I HAVE LABORED HARD AND SUCCESSFULLY IN GETTING MUCH LARGER SHARE OF GOG CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM THAN ORIGINALLY ENVISAGED BY BONGO. WHILE PC WASHINGTON HAS BEEN CUTTING BACK ON SOME OF ITS PROMISES TO US (E.G., PROVISION OF FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE VEHICLE) WE WERE CAJOLING GOG TO UP ITS ANTE. WE ESTIMATE THAT TOTAL GOG CONTRIBUTION OF ALL KINDS CLOSE TO DOLS 100,000. THIS IS NO MEAN FEAT CONSIDERING PRESIDENT BONGO'S ORIGINAL POSITION AND REFLECTS GREAT CREDIT ON NEGOTIATING SKILL OF PC DIRECTOR. POINT NOW REACHED WHERE LEVYING ANY NEW DEMANDS ON GOG WOULD BE VIEWED (QUITE CORRECTLY) BY BONGO AS COMPLETELY CONTRARY TO OUR ORIGINAL UNDERSTANDING. PROGRAM WOULD MOST LIKELY COLLAPSE AMID CONSIDERABLE BAD FEELING.

5. EMBASSY COMMENT: WE REALIZE FULL WELL THAT BONGO HAS USED SOME GOG REVENUES FOR PRESTIGE ITEMS OF QUESTIONABLE VALUE, AS HAVE ON MUCH LARGER SCALE MANY OTHER CHIEFS OF STATES TO WHICH WE EXTEND AID AND PC ASSISTANCE (ZAIRE, MOROCCO, IVORY COAST, ETC.). ARGUMENT COULD CERTAINLY BE MADE THAT NONE OF THESE GOVERN-

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MENTS ARE DESERVING OF OUR ASSISTANCE IN ANY FORM, REGARDLESS OF THE NEEDS OF THEIR PEOPLE. IN SHORT, I AM NOT MAKING SPECIAL PLEA FOR GABON ON GROUNDS GOG COULD NOT FIND RESOURCES FOR EVEN GREATER CONTRIBUTION TO OUR PC PROGRAM HERE, BUT MERELY ATTEMPTING IN PARAS 3 AND 4 ABOVE TO EXPLAIN HOW QUESTIONS WILL BE VIEWED HERE IN LIGHT OF HISTORY OF PROGRAM.

6. IF PC PROGRAM IN GABON HAS TO BE SACRIFICED TO ECONOMY DRIVE,

WE CAN CERTAINLY FIND ARGUMENTS TO JUSTIFY ACTION IN OUR OWN EYES AND WE HERE WILL MANAGE SOMEHOW TO COPE WITH INEVITABLE NEGATIVE FOLLOW-OUT. IN RETROSPECT, HOWEVER, IT WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN BETTER NOT TO HAVE RESUMED PROGRAM AT ALL.

7. FOLLOWING ARE ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS PARA 5 REFTEL.

A. GOG UNLIKELY TO AGREE FOR REASONS GIVEN ABOVE.

B. PROGRAM WOULD LIKELY END.

C. IMPACT WOULD BE CLEARLY NEGATIVE ALTHOUGH DAMAGE COULD BE ATTENUATED IF TIMING OF ACTION CAREFULLY PLANNED (E.G. AROUND TIME OF SIGNATURE OF AID LOAN FOR ROAD ASSISTANCE).

D. N/A

EM WITH NINE VOLUNTEERS AND FOURTEEN TRAINEES THERE IS NOT MUCH ROOM FOR "PHASING DOWN." IF SELF-HELP FUNDS SHOULD NO LONGER BECOME AVAILABLE IN FY76, PC SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BE ABOLISHED IN ANY CASE. A CONTINUATION OF A SMALL TEFL PROGRAM (WITHOUT INSISTING ON ADDITIONAL HOST CONTRIBUTIONS) WOULD BE BETTER THAN NOTHING.

8. PC DIRECTOR FULLY CONCURS IN THIS CABLE.

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